

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A system for dispensing articles to a consumer, said system comprising:

a first station at which articles having an assigned cash value are dispensed,

said first station a) comprising a first terminal at which a user identification related to an account can be directly input by a user directly upon the first terminal to process a user request for an article and b) capable of causing articles to be dispensed to a user,

said dispensing system further comprising a processing system, said processing system causing an article to be dispensed to a user at the first station in response to a user's inputting of a user's identification related to an account at the first terminal,

said system further comprising a second station that is similar to the first station and the processing system causes an article to be dispensed to a user at either of the first and second stations in response to a user's inputting of a user's identification related to an account directly at the terminal at either of the first and second stations,

wherein the processing system further comprises a central processor at a first location through which control of each of the first and second stations is coordinated at second and third locations, respectively, that are remote from the first location,

wherein the central processor is capable of tracking transactions carried out at the first and second stations from the first location.

2. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein a plurality of articles having different cash values are provided at the first station to be dispensed.

3. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein the processing system is capable of monitoring a user cash account maintainable by a user and related to a user's identification.

4. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein the first station further comprises an input site at which a user can initiate a transaction to cause dispensing of an article at the first station.

5. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 4 wherein articles of different cash values can be dispensed at the first station and a user can initiate a transaction by identifying through the input site an article of a desired cash value to be dispensed.

6. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 3 wherein the processing system is capable of determining whether a balance in a user cash account is at least equal to an assigned cash value to an article that is selected through a user request for the selected article at the first station.

7. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 3 wherein the processing system is capable of adding funds to a user cash account in response to a user direction at the first station.

8. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 7 wherein the first terminal comprises a key pad into which a user identification related to an account can be input.

9. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 7 wherein the dispensing system further comprises a credit card reader to allow funds to be added to a user cash account by processing a credit card.

10. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein the articles comprise tickets or tokens redeemable for at least one of a) another article and b) a service.

11. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein the articles comprise at least one of a) an edible/consumable item, b) a functional item, and c) a novelty item.

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Original) The system for dispensing articles according to claim 1 wherein the first terminal is capable of processing a user request for an article without requiring inputting of any foreign object at the first terminal.

16. (previously presented) A method of dispensing articles, said method comprising the steps of:

- providing a first station at which articles can be dispensed to a user;
- creating a cash account for a first user;
- assigning a user identification related to the first user's cash account;
- at the first station processing a request by the first user for a selected article by determining the first user's identification in response to an input by the first user directly at the first station;
- after determining the first user's identification, causing the selected article to be dispensed;
- causing an assigned value for the article to be reflected in the first user's cash account,
- providing a second station at which articles can be dispensed to a user; and
- operatively interconnecting the first and second stations so that the first user can cause a selected article to be dispensed at either of the first and second stations and cause the assigned value for the selected article dispensed at either of the first and second stations to be reflected on the first user's cash account.

17. (Original) A method of dispensing articles according to claim 16 wherein the step of processing a request by the first user comprises processing a request by the first user by determining the first user's identification, in response to an input by the first user, that does not require input or processing of a foreign object at the first station.

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Original) A method of dispensing articles according to claim 16 further comprising the step of monitoring transactions at the first station from a location remote from the first station.

20. (Original) A method of dispensing articles according to claim 16 wherein the step of providing a first station comprises providing a first station at which articles comprising at least one of: a) tickets or tokens redeemable for at least one of i) another article and ii) a service; b) an edible/consumable item; c) a functional item; and d) a novelty item can be dispensed to a user.

21. (currently amended) A system for dispensing articles to a consumer, said system comprising:

a first station at which articles having an assigned cash value are dispensed and through which a user cash account can be accessed,

said first station a) comprising a first terminal at which a user identification related to an account can be directly input to process a user request for an article and b) capable of causing articles to be dispensed to a user without requiring any cash input by a user at the first station,

said dispensing system further comprising a processing system, said processing system causing c) an article to be dispensed to a user at the first station in response to a user's inputting of a user's identification related to an account at the first terminal[[:]] and d) the cash value of the article to be applied against the user cash account.

wherein the first station comprises a sensor mechanism that allows a user identification to be made through the detection of anatomical attributes peculiar to a user.